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LETTER DATED 15 JUNE 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

The Executive Chairman of the Special Commission, Mr. Rolf Ekéus, has informed the Security Council that on 14 June 1996 Iraqi air defence positions aimed at a Special Commission helicopter flying in the Abu Ghraib area. Accordingly, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq, Mr. Tariq Aziz, gave instructions for an immediate inquiry into the alleged incident.

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the findings of that inquiry, and I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Nizar HAMDOON
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Findings of the inquiry into the alleged incident of 14 June 1996

1. At 0800 hours on 14 June 1996 a United Nations helicopter escorted by an Iraqi helicopter took off from Rashid airbase to carry out a reconnaissance mission over an unknown objective within an 80-by-65-kilometre area. Those on board the United Nations helicopter were accompanied by three Iraqis, including an Iraqi pilot, and they included the Australian leader of the UNSCOM Aerial Inspection Team.

2. At 0817 hours the helicopters arrived at a point close to the West Baghdad expressway intersection and the Iraqi representative in the UNSCOM helicopter was given the coordinates of the intended objective. It turned out to be a Republican Guard base, and the team leader was informed that this was a sensitive site of which overflights were not permitted. The team leader acceded to this and gave the coordinates of the second objective. It turned out to be a presidential site. He was informed of this also, and it was decided to return to Rashid airfield. The helicopters landed there at 0940 hours.

3. At 0945 hours Chief Inspector Smidovich of the UNSCOM 150 inspection team contacted Brigadier-General Husam Muhammad Amin, Director of the National Monitoring Directorate, and informed him that anti-aircraft guns in the area had been aimed at their helicopter. When inquiries were made with the party concerned it became clear that this allegation was untrue, and he was informed accordingly at 1000 hours.

4. At 1100 hours Chief Inspector Smidovich asked Brigadier-General Husam Muhammad Amin to be allowed to fly over the old Abu Ghraib road (to observe the Republican Guard base) and to fly from there over a Republican Guard self-propelled field artillery detachment. Agreement to this was obtained subject to discussion of details of the flight over the two locations in question between the Iraqi officer concerned on the one hand and the leader of the Aerial Inspection Team and the commander of the German airmen on the other. The new flight plan was then drawn up and takeoff was at 1200 hours.

5. At 1220 hours the United Nations helicopter escorted by an Iraqi helicopter arrived over the second objective (a Republican Guard self-propelled field artillery detachment) and proceeded to circle the objective for a period of two and a half hours. It then returned to Rashid airbase.

6. During the long time the overflight lasted, neither the leader of the Aerial Inspection Team nor the commander of the airmen made any remark with regard to any alleged movement by the guns, and both parties were surprised by the allegation after the helicopter landed at Rashid airbase.

7. All anti-aircraft weapons were secured by those concerned some minutes before the helicopters took off and remained secured until they landed back at the base, in accordance with the procedures followed in order to ensure the safety of aircraft and those on board.

8. While the helicopter was flying over the objective at 1400 hours, Chief Inspector Smidovich contacted Brigadier-General Husam Muhammad Amin and informed him that soldiers had taken up position at a number of anti-aircraft guns and had turned the guns in the direction of the United Nations helicopter. When inquiries were made with the party concerned, it became clear that this allegation was untrue. It transpired that a number of soldiers had manned positions near their guns on sighting the helicopter, which is a normal procedure and was not intended to pose a threat to the United Nations helicopter or to affect its mission. The situation is that the alleged incident was reported by an inspector who was close to the artillery position near the Republican Guard base and communicated these allegations to the Chief Inspector by radio. It appears that Chief Inspector Smidovich understood that the artillery position was close to the helicopter, while the helicopter did not pass over air defence weapons.

9. At 1407 hours the Chief Inspector of the UNSCOM 150 team was informed that these were air defence operating procedures and that there was no problem with your aircraft, particularly since there was an Iraqi helicopter accompanying it and Iraqi escorts on board. Brigadier-General Husam Muhammad Amin also made it clear to him that no guns were turned in the direction of the helicopter or in any other direction and that the Chief Inspector could verify that with the helicopter crew or the leader of the Aerial Inspection Team, who were in the helicopter and were those directly involved in the incident.

10. From the facts mentioned it is clear that the allegation made by the Executive Chairman to the Security Council and to the press was hasty and based on inaccurate information and that it has no foundation.